

New Fiction

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lations and hesitancy of a young girl who, before her heart is really touched, successively fancies herself in love with a number of young men that are obviously the wrong ones, and whose doubts vanish like morning mists when at last she meets the right one.

There is just one thing which lifts this book out of the class of worthy mediocrity, and that is the vivid, vibrant personality of Ann Byrne herself—Ann with flaming red Irish hair and a generous allotment of Irish temper, together with a persuasiveness all her own, which, when the civil war breaks out, takes her like a ray of sunshine into the hospitals, opens the way through the battle lines in search of a man she believes to be dead, permits her to spend a night in a deserted house with an Italian military attaché as sole company and brings her home unscathed from the horrors of the battle field of Gettysburg. It is a rare achievement to write a story of the dim past, a costume story, with the men in Federal blue and the women in crinoline, and make the spirit of that book as imperishably young and as ardently alive as though it were a story of to-day or to-morrow. That is precisely what Mrs. Fairbank has done, and one may predict that Ann Byrne will make a far wider circle of friends than many of the more imposing and more modern heroines of the season's fiction.

Although the New York of the '50s and '60s is for the most part faithfully pictured, one notes an occasional slip, as where the French actress, Rachel, is made to appear at Wallack's, whereas, in fact, she appeared at Tripler's Hall (and there caught the cold from which she died). And in the Washington chapter the Arlington mansion is mentioned as "Gen. Lee's Estate," although, of course, he lived there merely by right of his wife's life interest in it.

PHILIP TILLINGHAST.

MUMMERS IN MUFTI. By Philip Curtiss. The Century Company.

THIS is the tale of a wealthy New Englander, last of a line of aristocratic ancestors who, seeking some outlet for his energies, becomes the owner of a musical comedy, which he purchases "on the road." The comedy, which has not been a successful one by any means, is playing in the home town of Arnold Bellsmith, when carrying out the "prescription" of his physician he purchases it, lock, stock and barrel. Of course, one of the members of the cast is a pretty and temperamental young woman, who figures even more importantly in the story. Mr. Curtiss tells than she did in the musical comedy "Eleanor" until Bellsmith took it over and made it over.

"Mummers in Mufti" has a plot and a speedy action that should make it popular with those who read a story just for the story. But it has, too, a whimsicality that makes it stand out among recent works of fiction. Here, for instance, is one pleasing little diversion that the author grants to his hero, even though the progress of the charming tale must stand by while he indulges in it. Bellsmith is looking through the kitchen window of a cheap and dingy restaurant:

Within he saw an immense Italian chef



Janet A. Fairbank, author of "The Cortlandts of Washington Square."

with an opera mustache and a filthy apron, but with the inevitable white cap of his trade on his head. In an instant of nervous whimsy it came to Bellsmith as a novel and remarkable idea that even a third class restaurant has to have a chef. Where did such chefs come from, he wondered, and what, eventually, became of them? Did they go up or down from that stage of their profession? What would happen if he should step into that kitchen and ask for *pate a la reine*? Would the chef throw a meat cleaver at him or would he burst into tears?

AVERAGE CABINS. By Isabel C. Clarke. Benziger Brothers.

THAT rigidly conventional Roman world to which Marion Crawford introduced many American readers in his Italian novels is the opening scene of Miss Clarke's new novel whose title is plucked out of Browning's reference to how "we cross the ocean of this world each in his average cabin of a life." Although the tale begins after the close of the war there is still much of the old spirit left of what an amusing young London girl in the story calls "quite nineteenth century and eighteen-seventy-ish" atmosphere in the Italian head of the Ascarelli family who compels Denis Lorimer to fight a duel with him because Denis had been indiscreet enough to tell Camilla Ascarelli that he loved her after he had formally proposed for her hand. That lovemaking of the impoverished one time British officer drove him back to London and, for the second time, into the generous hands of Father John Ponsford, who took Denis up into another sort of lonely parish such as Crawford again once described.

These reminiscences of the older novelist are not meant to convey the impression that Miss Clarke's story is in any sense modeled on Crawford. She knows her work and her Roman and English worlds too well for that, just as she knows her job of telling a good story, as is this one of the unfortunate Denis Lorimer and the unhappy Janet Ponsford. She knows her job so well that she contrasts admirably the rigid old conventions of Roman and English life with the freer spirit that has come among them as one result of the war; and this she does by setting off the dowager Mrs. Ponsford, with all her Victorian stupidities and cruelties against those kinder ones of her American daughter-in-law and the progressive village doctor. The solution of Denis's problem, through the avenue of the confessional, is a perfectly logical one under the circumstances of the triangle presented, Father Ponsford and his sister Janet being Catholics. And since the solution makes for Janet's happiness all sentimental novel readers will approve of it the more.

BROKEN BARRIERS. By Meredith Nicholson. Charles Scribner's Sons.

M. R. NICHOLSON'S literary brew, one of those that, justly, made Indianapolis famous, has lost none of its potency in these after-the-war, prohibition times. He keeps abreast of the newest social developments and is fully aware of the flapper and her ways. This story, in fact, is a deliberate presentation of the problem of

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Philip Curtiss, author of "Mummers in Mufti."